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EARLY ITALIAN PAINTERS

LECTURE BY B. E. WALKER
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MARCH, 1894



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LECTURE BY B. E. WALKER, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO,
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I AM to talk to you this afternoon about some early Italian painters. It might seem natural to begin by discussing the value of the so-called old masters, but that, I am sure, is unnecessary in addressing the present audience. It would not be amiss, perhaps, to remind some of my hearers that much of the dislike of the so-called old masters which existed in the first half of this century, and even later, was caused by the gloomy productions of the decline—those dark shadows of the afternoon which followed the mid-day splendour of the age of Raphael—those tedious variations of the same themes regarding which everything had been done that originality of composition and skill in painting could accomplish. But I am to speak to you of the morning time, when every painter worthy of the name was adding his share to the increasing total of ideas and technical skill which was to make Raphael and Michael Angelo possible. I am to speak of the time when, so far from perfection having left little for the painters to do but to slightly vary the form of it, it had not yet arrived. For my own part the period of growth in an art movement is the most interesting. Although our grandfathers would not do so, we have learned to admire the sculptures of the school of Phidias more than those of Praxiteles; and in the art movement we are to consider—that of

religious painting in Italy—we should, I think, admire the serious genius of Fra Bartolommeo much more than the exquisite grace of Correggio, or the masterly composition of Domenichino. Raphael had intervened, and “what’s come to perfection perishes.”

Matthew Arnold would doubtless warn us to beware of the historical estimate, almost as dangerous in literature as the personal estimate. It is undoubtedly very necessary to beware lest we value a painter too highly because of his historical position. Because the elder Pollajuolo was the first modern to study anatomy by dissection, we must not therefore conclude that he was a genius, or a great anatomical painter; but it is clear that we could not estimate his true importance without understanding his historical position. Here and there Fra Angelico or Botticelli may be over-praised, and an altar may even be raised to the fantastic Benozzo Gozzoli. This is just as foolish as over-praise of Herrick or some other Elizabethan whose poetry, however charming and beautiful, is not the outpouring of genius of the highest order. It is, however, a very amiable kind of weakness, natural in an age of investigation. We are all apt to be carried away by our own discoveries, and to conclude that the obscure something which we with difficulty have come to understand is the fruit of hitherto unappreciated genius. It is not this possibility of too highly praising particular early painters we have to dread, so much as failure to appreciate the genius and influence of such truly great minds as Masaccio, Signorelli, or Leonardo.

The historical estimate—the disposition to value a painter too highly because he accomplished work important for his time, but not important for all time—is undoubtedly a snare to most of us, but what we have most to dread is the personal estimate. Let me again make a comparison by quoting what Matthew Arnold

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says as to the personal estimate in judging poetry: "A poet or a poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, liking, and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses."

Lamb, who delighted in the pictures of Hogarth, was unwilling to listen to any criticism of Hogarth's technical skill. The story was everything, and to the painter's composition Lamb easily and unconsciously added what was wanting out of his own fertile brain. This was the estimate of the man of letters, not the art critic, and it was therefore a personal estimate. Hogarth the painter meant nothing, but Hogarth the satirist, the humorist, everything, to Lamb. No remark is more frequently heard in a gallery of paintings than "I don't like that *kind* of picture." We all make it at times, and I certainly think there are many kinds of pictures which had better not have been painted. Nevertheless this is the personal estimate, and unless it is persistently restrained it is destructive of all catholic enjoyment of art and all sound art criticism. We can imagine that a Puritan of two hundred years ago could not possibly have so overcome the personal estimate as to admire the altar pieces of Romish churches; indeed many gentle-minded Protestants twenty-five or fifty years ago were unable or unwilling to do so. We live in a happier time, and yet many fail utterly to appreciate the beauty of the religious paintings of the early Italians, because, while they endeavour to crush the personal estimate, they are unable to exercise their critical powers from the point of view of the painter, the point of view of his time and country. Indeed this is as necessary in looking at the work of modern as of the early painters. If it is a pastoral picture, it will not do to say "I do not care for sheep and cows." We may make Jacque and

Troyon our standards, and criticize without stint what falls short of these high standards, but for the time being we must do our best to be interested in sheep and cows.

Let us then consider what was the nature of the country and the time, what were the surrounding influences when Giotto came from the fields of Vespignano, his hand in that of his patron Cimabue. Unless we can become Italians of the thirteenth century for the moment, we cannot hope to escape the personal estimate created by our surroundings in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps because of that tendency to hero-worship present in almost all of us, many who think they grasp the significance of the Renaissance are apt to exaggerate the conditions which preceded Giotto, imagining as hopeless an atmosphere as possible for the growth of art, and thus elevating Giotto into a discoverer or rediscoverer of the first magnitude. It was not unnatural that in Italy, as in England, painting should only be stirring in the bud at the moment when the superb flower of Italian literature was opening into full bloom, but we must not suppose that the time was unfavourable to the development of the first modern genius in painting.

When wearying of that symbolic art which they had copied from the Romans and applied in fresco, mosaic and sculpture to the stories of the Bible, the early Christians developed the crude pictorial art we see in the mosaics of the fifth and sixth centuries in Rome, and in those splendid remnants at Ravenna of the short period of the great Ostrogoths, Theodoric and Justinian, we are at least impressed by these efforts at the depiction of real life. These mosaics, crude as they are, are actual efforts, not altogether unsuccessful, at portraiture. But such other mosaics and sculpture as are preserved show this little burst of realism fading into a slavish adherence to a few types

during the succeeding centuries, until about the eleventh. It was during the two centuries which followed the eleventh, during the bewildering struggle of religion, war and commerce, that the conditions arose which produced Dante and Giotto. Dark as were these dark ages, they were illuminated here and there by great men and great events; gigantic intellects like Hildebrand stamping remorselessly the mark of papal supremacy on everything; fierce soldiers such as Conrad and Barbarossa, the second Frederick and Rudolph, fighting for the Imperial crown; and the amazing religious revival—of which the Crusades were the conspicuous outcome—turning western Europe into a recruiting ground, and the east into a vast camp, where wild and picturesque Northmen, Britons and Gauls, with the less barbarous soldiers of the Italian republic, came in contact with the civilization of the Orient. It was in such a stirring time, aided somewhat by the commerce, the wealth and the vanity of the republics, that art ventured to rise. Wonderful objects brought from the East inspired the metal workers in Germany and the stone carvers in France. Saracenic architects were building out of Greek ruins in Sicily castles for the great Frederick and his warriors, while at his court Arab and Jewish sages, and turbaned envoys from the Sultan of Cairo, elbowed the German and Italian clerics. Well might the Pope disapprove of Frederick's menageries of wild beasts from Africa, his beautiful dancing girls from Turkey, the German minstrels, the juggler, the French *trouvere* reciting fierce tales of battle, murder and sudden death, and the love-lorn troubadour of the South. Other things were brought back from the East, other thoughts and actions arose from the Crusades, than the Church expected or desired. As Carlyle says: "That brave young hey-day of chivalry and minstrelsy, when a stern

Barbarossa, a stern Lion-heart, sang *sirventes*, and with the hand that could wield the sword and sceptre twanged the melodious strings; when knights-errant tilted, and ladies' eyes rained bright influences; and suddenly, as at sunrise, the whole earth had grown vocal and musical."

While not entirely foreign to my purpose, I have not time to describe the wonderful effect on all western Europe of the rebuilding in the eleventh and succeeding centuries of the Basilica at Venice, with that prodigal splendour which to-day makes one feel the influence of the Orient the moment he steps upon the square of St. Mark's. Nor can I more than remind you that at this time in trans-Alpine Europe the foundations were being laid of those cathedrals which move us of the northern races perhaps more than any buildings the hand of man has fashioned out of stone.

Italy, even as late as the early part of the twelfth century, was behind Germany and France in architecture and sculpture. There were no classic models for the workers north of the Alps, and therefore there was more originality, although the result was a long struggle for harmony between architecture and plastic ornament. Indeed in such north Italian cities as Modena (1099), Verona (1139), Ferrara (1135), and others, we find that the most important works in sculpture in the basilicas and cathedrals built in the early part of the twelfth century were entrusted to Germans. Even a century later at Assisi, we find a German master (Jacopo Tedesco) at work. But it was left for the Pisans, at this time wealthy and successful rivals of Venice and Genoa in commerce, to accomplish, under the influence of the sculptured remnants of the old Roman colony at this place, all that was possible in Romanesque architecture. The cathedral begun 1063, consecrated 1118; the Baptistery begun 1153, and not

finished for a century and a quarter (1278); the Campanile, the so-called Leaning Tower, begun 1174, and because of its unfortunate accident not finished until 1350, and the Campo Santo, form a group of buildings in connection with which, from the foundation of the cathedral to the crowning of the bell tower, nearly 300 years were consumed. The work accomplished in this period must have had an effect on all Italy, the force of which can hardly be overestimated. What we are at the moment mainly concerned with is that it gave us the sculptor of the pulpit in the Baptistery, Niccolo Pisano, and with all the other fruit of his genius in work by his own hand and inspiration to his pupils, he gave Italy the great architect, Arnolfo di Cambio. Early in the thirteenth century the cathedral at Siena was begun, and although the dome was completed (1254) before Giotto was born, during his life and for half a century thereafter, the leading architects and sculptors were adding to its glories. At Orvieto (1290) the cathedral; at Florence, the cathedral (1294), the churches of Santa Croce (1294) and Santa Maria Novella (1278), and the Palazzo Vecchio (1298)—not to speak of works of lesser importance—were all building when Giotto was entering upon manhood. Arnolfo, having helped Niccolo Pisano with his second wonderful pulpit, that at Siena, and also, it is said, at Pisa, Perugia, Cortona, Orvieto, Bologna, Rome and elsewhere, was at Florence, growing old, but still in the full tide of his career, designing at the same time the Cathedral, the Palazzo Vecchio and the Church of Santa Croce. Dante was yet to enjoy a few years of his beloved city before his banishment forever, and it is not hard to imagine the effect upon the open mind of Giotto of his many-sided genius, accompanied as it was by a friendship which neither time nor distance abated. Petrarch

and Boccaccio were both born a few years after this time, and were respectively 33 and 24 years old when Giotto died. I have not time to dwell upon the many artists, now known by name, who preceded Giotto, further than to mention a few leaders who should not be disregarded by a student of the period. Many of you will have admired the mosaics of Jacopo da Torrita, particularly the coronation at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, richly decorative in form and color, finely balanced and full of solemn feeling, a specimen of the best of the mosaics, executed in the short Romanesque period which followed in western Italy the Byzantine. He worked also in the Church of St. John Lateran in Rome with Gaddo Gaddi, who is said to have executed the mosaics in the cathedral and baptistery at Florence, and who was an easel and fresco painter, but is chiefly interesting now as the friend of Cimabue and the father and teacher of Giotto's godson and disciple, Taddeo Gaddi. Half a century earlier there lived at Pisa a painter now called Giunta Pisano, a mere name to me, although the work said to be by him may be seen there and at Assisi, and at the same time, or a little later, but earlier than Torrita and Gaddo Gaddi, the better known Guido da Siena flourished, whose Madonna and child in the Institute of Fine Arts at Siena is, perhaps, the best specimen of painting under Christian influences before Cimabue.

It is not necessary, therefore, to give any attention to Vasari's story of Cimabue learning his art from Greek painters employed to decorate Santa Maria Novella. From the Florentine miniature painters and illustrators, of whom several are known by name, he may have learned something, but we need look no further than Giunta of Pisa, and Guido of Siena, by whose work he was without doubt instructed. He was a complete master in mosaics, witness his work at Pisa; and in

painting, whether we regard his wall painting at Assisi or his easel painting, he infused some life and grace of form and colour into art, while in painting the heads of men he exhibited even force and character.

I cannot better illustrate the condition of the art of which Giotto was destined to broaden the scope, than by quoting a description, compressed by W. M. Rossetti from Crowe and Cavalcaselle, of the Madonna da Rucellai, the most important altar piece produced up to that time, that picture which was carried through the streets of the Florentine suburb in which Cimabue lived :

“ The Virgin in a red tunic and blue mantle, with her feet resting on an open-worked stool, is sitting on a chair hung with white drapery flowered in gold and blue, and carried by six angels kneeling in threes above each other. A delicately engraved nimbus surrounds her head, and that of the infant Saviour on her lap, who is dressed in a white tunic and purple mantle shot with gold. A dark-coloured frame surrounds the gabled square of the picture, delicately traced with an ornament interrupted at intervals by thirty medallions on gold ground, each of which contains the half-figure of a Saint. In the face of the Madonna is a soft and melancholy expression ; in the form of the infant, a certain freshness, animation and natural proportion ; in the group, affection—but too rare at this period. There is sentiment in the attitudes of the angels, energetic mien in some prophets, comparative clearness and soft harmony in the colours. A certain loss of balance is caused by the overweight of the head in the Virgin as compared with the slightness of her frame. The features are the old ones of the thirteenth century, only softened as regards the expression of the eye, by an exaggeration of elliptical form in the iris, and closeness of the curves of the lids. In the angels, the absence of

all true notions of composition may be considered striking; yet their movements are more natural and pleasing than hitherto. One indeed, to the spectator's right of the Virgin, combines more tender reverence in its glance than any that had yet been produced. Cimabue gave to the flesh tints a clear and carefully fused colour, and imparted to the forms some of the rotundity which they had lost. With him vanished the sharp contrast of hard lights, half tones, and shadows."

Let me at once compare the Madonna and child of Giotto, in the Gallery of Ancient and Modern Paintings in Florence. Many of you will have seen the picture, and many will know it from the photograph. There is no effort to make a radical departure from the Madonnas of Guido and Cimabue. She is in each case the enthroned queen of heaven, not the mother of Jesus, here on earth. The heads of the Madonna, the child, and the angels and saints, are each surrounded with the usual nimbus made in the shape of a disc of gold, without regard to whether the face is full or in profile, a most distracting feature if we attempt to judge of a painter's capacity for ordinary composition. But we cannot fail at once to notice the greater air of reality about the picture, especially the simple and natural manner in which the Madonna exhibits the divine child for the admiration of the angels and saints. The faces of mother and child, while not beautiful, are distinct efforts to present types of real human faces instead of the abstractions of the earlier period. The drapery, ornamentation and colour are greatly advanced, while the grouping of the angels and saints, both natural and fairly correct in perspective, is perhaps the clearest evidence of Giotto's improvement upon his predecessors. The angel holding the tiara of the Pope is so beautiful in every respect that I do not think succeeding painters have improved upon it, save in technical skill. The

architectural features of these early pictures are very interesting. The Madonna of Giotto sits upon a gothic throne, the ornamentation of which is in the style of the exquisite work of his contemporaries the Cosmati brothers, much of which may still be seen at Rome. I noticed recently that the modern French painter, Bouguereau, in trying to give some religious quality to a so-called Madonna and child, seats her upon a Cosmatic throne of this period—a pitiful admission as to the possibilities of his time and country in religious painting.

But in altar pieces there was little opportunity, because of conventional taste regarding such pictures, and because of the small space, for the genius of Giotto; but fortunately the church architecture of Italy afforded, as the northern gothic did not, those flat walls which made it possible for him to revolutionize art by telling in fresco the stories of the Bible. Although his works may be seen in many parts of Italy, he can only be studied in Florence, Padua and Assisi, and apart from the small frescoes at Santa Maria Novella, about which Ruskin has written so enthusiastically, the modern student, who desires everything compressed for him, may learn to appreciate Giotto without going outside the walls of the Church of Santa Croce in Florence, and the Arena Chapel in Padua. I have not time to discuss particular subjects—I can only briefly refer to the qualities, good and defective, to be found in his work generally.

Our attention is first drawn to the fact that his figures are generally flat—that there is no evidence of any knowledge of anatomy and little of perspective. Again, they are mostly in profile, although many faces, such as the Christ on the ceiling of the Arena Chapel, one of the magicians in the story of St. Francis before the Soldan, and others, show that he could paint the full face quite as perfectly when he made the effort.

Although his hands have the faults of all the very early painters, he makes excellent use of them in the simple gestures which are so effective in helping to tell the story ; but feet, especially feet in perspective, are beyond him, and his efforts at fore-shortening limbs are very unsuccessful, as may be seen in the Arena frescoes—one of the figures in the Raising of Lazarus, and the flying angels in the Birth of Christ. While the drapery as a rule shows little grace, it is always in excellent keeping with what the painter desires to express. That he could paint elaborately ornamented garments and make them hang in complicated folds, he has demonstrated, but we may be sure that he selected his simple drapery because it would not distract the mind from his narrative. If Shakespeare were alive to-day he would doubtless not wholly approve of the elaborate stage-setting of his plays as they are now produced. A little less attention to the draperies of Cordelia and a little more to the words of the poet would doubtless occur to him as desirable, and Giotto, in his humbler way, meant first of all that his dramas should be at once understood.

His faces do not suggest any power of portraiture. They are not expressionless abstractions of humanity, as were those of the older school, but they are more like types of people than individuals painted from real life. There are many different types, some clearly of the people existing around him, some, such as the magician already referred to, which leave nothing to be desired in expression ; but if painted from models he had little power of portraiture. Indeed it would have been strange if he had.

His schemes of colour, and the balancing of his compositions, are very simple, although the colours are often rich and brilliant, and the arrangement of the figures nearly perfect for the purpose. In both respects the

visitor to the chapels in the Church of Santa Croce containing frescoes by Giotto will not be disappointed.

Considering the technical defects and merits of his painting as that which causes our historical interest in him, what is the quality which warrants our high regard apart from the historical estimate? Clearly it is his power of telling his story—the reality of his conception. The emotions expressed by his characters are as simple as their draperies, but absolutely effective. The gesture or expression of the face indicates clearly pain or joy, love or repulsion. No modern analysis of emotions is necessary—none of the complexities in which Browning delights; nor are we bewildered by the exquisite beauty of textile fabrics or by schemes of colour which withdraw our attention from the main issue. Everything is made subordinate to the action of the story. In the Raising of Drusiana, a fresco in Santa Croce, there are more than twenty onlookers around the two central figures, and yet the rapt attention of all is so strongly expressed that before you can examine the details of the picture you are forced to enter into full sympathy with the meaning of it. He could use gorgeous colours and paint elaborately, but he chose not to do so. This is painting in the grand style, even if the technique is very far from perfect. Only a man of supreme common sense, a genius for apprehending facts as they are with veracious eye and intellect, could have done this, with nothing behind him but centuries of slavish adherence to conventionality, only slightly redeemed by the few painters I have mentioned. Well may it be said that "The early efforts of Ciambue and Giotto are the burning messages of prophecy, delivered by the stammering lips of infants."

Siena, as we know, had been a greater centre of art than Florence down to this time, and during the period

of Giotto, say 1276 to about 1340, it still produced the greatest number of painters. The first great Siennese painter, however, was Duccio di Buoninsegna, who was born perhaps midway between Cimabue and Giotto, about 1260, and who outlived Giotto. While he was in some degree a reformer, he resembles Cimabue more than Giotto. He gave to his figures true proportions, beauty of drapery, elaborate ornament, and dramatic action, conditions not present before and scarcely ever improved upon in Siena. Indeed, he was free from many of the small technical defects of Giotto. Siennese altar pieces for several generations were but waning reflections of the grace and power of Duccio. His great altar piece, containing twenty-six scriptural scenes, was carried through the streets like the masterpiece of Cimabue, and will not even now fail to excite strong interest in any lover of the history of Art. The better known Simone Martini was born 1283, painted much, was the friend of Petrarch, as Giotto was of Dante, acquired fame and a competency. While Duccio painted altar pieces, to which even his twenty-six beautiful pictures were but a pendant, being almost miniatures in size, Simone painted in addition to altar pieces, important frescoes, and work in several cities was at one time attributed to him. But there is so much dispute as to what may be safely assigned to him that I will not enter upon the subject. The main point is that he tried by noble conceptions in fresco painting, as did the Lorenzetti brothers, his contemporaries, to free Siennese art from the slavery of altar pieces, and failed. For 150 years or so Siena continued to turn out altar pieces, but as we are concerned in the progress of art, not in its decadence, Siena may be left out of account hereafter.

Turning to the followers of Giotto, among the many we are only concerned with a small number. The great

Florentine, Orcagna (1308-1368), is the most important figure in the Giottesque school. Like Giotto he was architect, sculptor and painter. No one who has seen the bell tower of Giotto, will have failed to see the altar in marble, representing ten years of Orcagna's life, in the church of Or San Michele, a few yards from the masterpiece of Giotto. In painting, Orcagna softened the Florentine sternness or realism of Giotto, blending it with the tenderness and mysticism of the Sienese school. At Padua two painters, D'Avanzo Veronese and Altichiero, influenced by Giotto's work in the Arena Chapel, and working fifty to seventy-five years later, added the qualities of portraiture and individuality in each figure without loss of harmony in the composition as a whole, with improved perspective and dramatic force. D'Avanzo even advanced in expressional power beyond anything reached by Giotto. After Orcagna he is the greatest painter of the school of Giotto.

I have said nothing regarding the work of Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi, Spinello Aretino, and other followers of Giotto, because, although men of some capacity, they did not materially alter the conditions of painting.

We have reached the close of the first century after Giotto's birth, just half way between Giotto and Raphael. Little, as you see, has been accomplished as yet. Siena has practically dropped out of the race. The minor followers of Giotto, such as Agnolo Gaddi, have added some small graces and technical improvements. D'Avanzo has added the quality of individuality to the figures, and has increased the dramatic effect, while Orcagna has recovered the intensely religious quality, the poetry in fact, which Giotto in his great strides for truth had to some extent lost. But no new master has arisen. They are all of the school of Giotto.

We are now at the parting of the way. But before we take up the second race of reformers, let us continue in the old path for a short time until the spirit of those followers of Giotto who, like Orcagna and Agnolo Gaddi, sought to preserve in art the poetry of religion, ends in the divine Fra Angelico. Those of my hearers who have visited Florence will remember the Adoration of the Kings, with its pendant pictures, the centre of which is the Flight into Egypt, the work of Gentile da Fabriano. This painter, born about 1370, has been called the Umbrian Fra Angelico, and at one time was supposed to have been his teacher. He interests us mainly because he was certainly the teacher of Jacopo Bellini, whose sons, Gentile, and the younger but much more important, Giovanni, exercised such an influence upon Venetian art. Gentile da Fabriano shows the Umbrian love of gay colour and profuse ornament, by raised work in gold, in the gorgeous apparel of the kings. He has some sense of portraiture, but his manner of treatment, not very deep in feeling, is more suggestive of the much later Benozzo Gozzoli than of Angelico. I may also mention Fra Lorenzo Monaco, a direct descendant in style of Agnolo Gaddi. He also has the love of gay, pure colour and gilded ornament characteristic of his time, and if not the teacher of Fra Angelico, surely the source of some of his beautiful ideas.

We know comparatively little of the early life of Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, to whom the world has given the loving name of Fra Angelico. Born at Vecchio (near Vespignano, the birthplace of Giotto) in 1387, at the age of twenty he entered the Dominican order at Fiesole, dropping his christened name of Guido. Doubtless he had already received some training in art, and we readily accept the statement that he was at first employed to illuminate religious books. Indeed the

delicate finish, the clear bright colours, and the lack of roundness in his figures confirm this. His defects are easily seen. He had little range of light and shade, little knowledge of anatomy, and almost no movement, that is, no quickness or decision in the action of his figures. But he had other qualities which make us when we look at his pictures, either unaware of, or indifferent to, these defects. Perhaps no man before or since put into his paintings such intense religious feeling. He painted only for the sake of his religion—only what would increase faith and raise people to holier thoughts. He prayed and wept and lived holily, that his art might be purified from all earthly influences. Browning's "Unknown Painter," of a century later, strove to maintain this ecstatic altruism, but not without a bitter sense of all he had renounced. He cannot help telling us of the gifts he possesses, but has not dared to exercise: "I could have painted pictures like that youth ye praise so."

He dreams of worldly fame; of his picture carried about for the praise of Pope and Kaiser and the people.

"Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
Through old streets named afresh from the event,
Till it reached home, where learned Age should greet
My face, and Youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
And then not go to Heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—"

But he is frightened at the colder critics, and at those who buy and sell pictures

"Count them for garniture and household stuff"

And therefore, although not without a backward longing toward the world, he concludes:

" Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
 These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
 With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
 With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard,
 At least no merchant traffics in my heart ;
 The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
 Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart ;
 Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
 While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
 They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
 'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
 So c'e, my pictures : surely, gently die !
 Oh, youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth ?
 Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry ?
 Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth ? "

Few painters have been able, no matter how high
 the purpose, how deep the religious feeling, to resist
 the longing to

" Scan
 The license and the limit, space and bound,
 Allowed to truth made visible in man."

Yet we feel instinctively that Fra Angelico was not
 even disturbed by such a temptation. His mind was
 in that condition of joyous faith which, although we
 may not possess it ourselves, we hope is present in our
 children when we join with them in singing :

" There came a little child to earth
 Long ago ;
 And the angels of God proclaimed his birth
 High and low."

He had the simple faith combined with the expres-
 sional power which enabled him to realize in the material
 form of painting those visions of sweet angels and of
 heavenly things which the religious hymnist still tries
 to realize for us in poetry, although the modern painter
 no longer attempts it. He adhered closely to existing

traditions of religious art, adopting no reforms. But in his hands it lost the severity of the Giottesque school, deepened the poetry of the Sienese, and elevated the gay colour and gilded ornament of the Umbrians, to a purity and grace never excelled. Even the nimbus became a thing of radiant beauty. The gloomy figures, with perpendicular drapery, of the Byzantines, became those slender, exquisitely draped creations, with garments coloured like flowers, which have made for some of us the ideal of angels. No one, after seeing his angels, can be satisfied with the white-winged ghosts we have all at times imagined.

But his pictures are not all altar pieces—shining with gold and lovely colour. The frescoes on the white-washed walls of San Marco do not depend on these qualities. Painted to help the prayers of his fellow Dominicans, the solemn beauty and elevated imagination of these conceptions, especially the Transfiguration, must remain forever among the most precious memories of those who have been fortunate enough to see them. He was a conservative, but in working out the spiritual side of man, he gave us that supreme quality of Italian art, human faces, impressed with thoughts and feelings not attempted in art before. This and his pure colour and sense of ornament are his legacies to time. To those who quarrel with the subjective nature of his art, who say: "This may be Fra Angelico, but it is not nature"—I can but answer in the words of another: "Do not quarrel with genius. We have none ourselves, and yet are so constituted that we cannot live without it." We have had only one Fra Angelico, and the world would not part with what he has left us for untold riches of any other kind.

Let us now turn to the second race of reformers. A noble manner of representing the old types had been accomplished, and some attempt at truthfulness in

copying nature, but on the whole art was still fettered by the intensity of religious conventions. These conventions had not prevented, indeed they had partly caused, a great development in depicting human emotions, especially the spiritual side of humanity, and Giotto, Orcagna and Fra Angelico in this respect had much advanced art, but there was as yet little attempt at painting correctly the external show of things—little verisimilitude—and no one had been bold enough, perhaps none had desired, to present religious conceptions in a radically new form.

Ghiberti (1378-1455) the sculptor, in producing reliefs in metal, had developed perspective beyond the contemporary painters, and we have first to mention his pupil Paolo Ucello, who while he had the lack of colour and the hardness of style characteristic of sculptors who paint, attempted battle pieces, in which his horses and armed knights in their various attitudes indicate a knowledge of foreshortening not found earlier. And in some nearly ruined frescoes at Santa Maria Novella higher qualities of the same kind are shown, especially in one where the incidents of the flood are represented in a most spirited manner. His love of animals is always shown, especially in birds, whence his name "Ucello." Regarding perspective, it is well to remember that during Ucello's life it commanded the attention of many greater men. Brunelleschi (1379-1446) the architect, as well as the sculptor Ghiberti, studied it scientifically, while Piero della Francesca, the Umbrian painter, celebrated for his portraits, made geometry subservient to his art for the first time among moderns.

We must also spare a moment to Andrea del Castagna. He was an orphan, acquainted with poverty, a shepherd boy discovered drawing like Giotto. He appears as a sort of antitype to Fra Angelico. He

paints in a rude, fierce, but very strong and accurate manner, not decorative angels in bright colours and gold, but, almost in monochrome, the rugged, half-wild man of the wilderness, John the Baptist; his face in one instance with the furious energy of a Scottish covenanter, and, in another, an emaciated figure with the sense about it of carrying the sins of a wicked world. Both are terribly realistic conceptions of the sorrows of real humanity. These two painters, Ucello and Castagna, interesting only historically, make way for the immortal genius Masaccio. Born near Florence in 1402, he was already at the age of seventeen executing a commission at San Clemente in Rome, representing the life of St. Catherine of Alexandria. While this work is not in a marked degree different in kind, he already shows a sense of proportion, dignity and atmosphere quite beyond his contemporaries. He was back in Florence when only eighteen, and apparently began his chief work in the Brancacci Chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, about 1422 or 1423, leaving it unfinished at his disappearance in 1428.

The development of this marvellous boy is to me the most extraordinary fact in Italian art. We find him painting with beauty and power at eighteen, making an epoch in the art of the world almost as he came of age, and at twenty-six or seven passing over to that company which is neither quick nor dead—only absent from the sight and knowledge of their fellow men. Here is a reformer who does not attack the cherished ideals by painting with too forcible realism—does not indeed attack them at all. Nor is he a realist. He simply paints such external facts of nature as mountains, trees and clouds, subordinate though they be to his story, with more truthfulness and poetry combined than had been shown before. He shows a knowledge of space, atmosphere and perspective which

we can only account for by imputing it to his amazing genius. The flat figures of the Giotto school disappear, and are not only round, but modelled with an art almost perfect. Raphael did not disdain to copy his Adam and Eve, while the shivering young man upon the bank in the St. Peter Baptizing formed an epoch in art. He paints religious subjects in what may truly be called the grand style, but neither mystical nor realistic. Clearly he does not so love the human face for its spiritual beauty alone, and so hate the human flesh, as to paint the soul in a face which is attached to a body devoid of sufficiently correct anatomy to stand securely. On the contrary he delighted in the human form, cared much for its external beauty as a whole, was indeed a modern Greek. Who taught him we have now to confess we do not know. He painted, it is understood, elsewhere than in San Clemente at Rome, and the Brancacci chapel in the Carmine Church at Florence, but there is little else in existence now, and he is to be studied only in these two churches.

Before Masaccio began to paint in the Carmine Church, Fra Lippo Lippi entered the adjoining cloisters at the age of eight, so that, although he was only sixteen years old when Masaccio died, he unquestionably must have learned much from the work of the great master, whether directly instructed by him or not. We may as well dismiss from our minds at once the tales of Vasari regarding this and many other painters. Fra Lippo Lippi was just a simple naturalist, a quality required in painting at the moment, and for what he did as such he fills an important historical position among painters. He painted his Madonna as an ordinary Italian mother, the nimbus reduced sometimes to a floating ring, sometimes a floating disc so diaphanous as not to interfere with the otherwise natural effect of the picture. His Madonnas are not

beautiful, are dressed in quite worldly garments ornamented with strings of pearls and beautiful braids. wear head dresses of almost the same fashion as in contemporaneous portraits, and are not the least impressed with religious feeling—as Browning says, sufficient for Madonna or the daughter of Herodias “who went and danced and got men's heads cut off.” His babies are not divine infants, but the kind of splendidly robust babies the nurse and mother would be proud of. His angel children are ordinary children of the earth, often fat, wide-jawed, with short faces and short bodies; very real and unspiritual, but full of the gladness, the enjoyment and even the coarseness of natural life. In colour he was not only original, but he anticipated the richness of the Venetians and must have deeply influenced his immediate Florentine followers. He was not capable of high conceptions as to form, but he completely mastered the difficulties of drapery, in this respect leading the way also, and the remarkable freedom of some of his figures is greatly increased by the naturalness of the clinging robes about rapidly moving limbs. Finally, he loved the world about him—not in the bad sense of Vasari's tale—but because his nature prompted him to revolt from the subjective types of Fra Angelico, and drove him in the other direction to a quite unspiritual and objective naturalism. He saw and tried to paint:

“The world

—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises—and God made it all!”

When I undertook to deliver this lecture, I hoped to trace all the important lines of development down to the period immediately preceding Raphael, but I find it necessary to confine myself to Florence, and such neigh-

bouring schools as are involved in her history. Otherwise, at this point I should have discussed the early Venetians, Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, who inherited, as we have seen, through their father, some of the sweet Umbrian influence, and Andrea Mantegna, their brother-in-law, who first studied in the school of the unskilful artist but important antiquary, Squarcione, and therefore loved to introduce, as became the manner even with his Florentine contemporaries, beautiful fragments or complete designs drawn from the ruins of the art of the old Roman civilization. If I were tracing the development of landscape painting, the backgrounds of the greater Bellini would mark an epoch. If the history of German art were being considered, the lasting influence of Mantegna and Bellini upon Albert Durer, their junior by some years, would be a point of interest. It is hard, also, to pass by those painters of Murano, the Vivarini, who introduced such an intensity of colour into Venetian art.

But our course is with Florence, and asking you for a moment to return to Ucello and Castagna, I shall briefly refer to two Florentine naturalists of the same type. The elder Pollajuolo is to be noticed as the first who studied anatomy by actual dissection. His paintings are otherwise uninteresting, but many of you will remember in the National Gallery in London his extraordinary treatment of St. Sebastian. The wounded saint does not lean sentimentally against a tree after the usual manner. The bole of the tree separates, four or five feet above ground, into three limbs, of which two are cut off, and on the two stumps he stands, his back against the surviving limb. Thus conveniently elevated, six archers in as many different attitudes transform the tortured saint into a sort of pin-cushion, all of course in order to exhibit the artist's skill in anatomical drawing. The new born love of the antique

is shown by the ruins of a Roman triumphal arch introduced at one side of the background, while behind all is a landscape of great extent—miles of open country—showing complete knowledge of perspective and great advance in the drawing of mountains and trees. Unfortunately it is all hard in style and unpleasing. Another artist who, if we are to believe Vasari, was a goldsmith, sculptor, carver, painter, teacher of perspective, and musician, is Andrea del Verocchio, that is, "Andrew with the true-eye." He has left as evidence of his skill the equestrian statue in the Piazza San Giorgio e San Paolo in Venice, which Ruskin declares to be still the best equestrian statue in the world, and the intensely Florentine David now in the Bargello museum in Florence; but of pictures there is only one which can certainly be assigned to him, the Baptism of Christ in the Academy at Florence, and in that the two angels are attributed to his pupil, Leonardo da Vinci. The background, a poetical dream of mountains and sunshine, is the forerunner of those backgrounds of Leonardo which, whether Ruskin will permit or not, most of us will continue to regard with unmixed delight. The figure of John the Baptist in the picture is quite as realistic, but very different from the half wild creatures of Castagna. This lean, rugged man suggests the pious, deeply serious Puritan of later days, but with no fierceness; on the contrary his face expresses an overwhelming sense of the terrible destiny on earth of the man Jesus whom he is baptising.

We have now had a long race of simple and devout painters, satisfied to paint nothing but religious pictures, and cheerfully following the conventions regarding such; and we have had a revolt in the shape of naturalistic painters who sought to combine religious subjects with faithful painting of the external facts of nature which they selected from the scenes of life about

them. We have also had some tendency towards secular subjects, and a widely spread effort to master the scientific principles of art—to improve the technique. It is interesting to note the teachers and their pupils at this time.

Verocchio, the True-eye, had three famous pupils, Leonardo da Vinci, Lorenzo di Credi, and Pietro Perugino. Giorgione, although fellow pupil with Titian of Bellini, was so impressed by the style of Leonardo that he became the teacher of Titian, who taught the world. Perugino, as you know, taught Raphael, who taught the world. Masaccio, as we have seen, was the direct or indirect teacher of Fra Lippo Lippi, and that nature-loving painter taught Sandro Botticelli, the only contemporary the great Leonardo chose to mention in his treatise on art, and whose work we have now to consider. Botticelli was born in 1446, at a time when the resurrection of the classic remains of plastic art and literature and the study of the classic myths made an atmosphere in which the simple faith of the time of Giotto could no longer exist. If we wish to understand the art of Botticelli we must consider the effect of the literature of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, of the Platonic academy of Cosimo de Medici and its director, Marsilio Ficino, translator of Plato, of the intellectual curiosity of the time which made it possible for the father of his country to be at once a statesman, merchant-banker, collector of Greek, Latin and Oriental manuscripts, a worshipper at an actual shrine to Plato and a patron of the art of Fra Angelico. Little wonder that before the close of the century there should have appeared such an æsthetic pagan as Pico della Mirandola and such a religious reformer as Savonarola. Little wonder perhaps, too, that Pico should, after all his philosophising, be shrived by Savonarola and die in the garb of a Dominican,

although doubtless half pagan to the end. In this complex world, and sensitive to its finer elements, the peculiar genius of Botticelli reflected in painting what was best in the culture of the time. His own life was without much event. After Fra Lippo Lippi died he became the most celebrated painter in Florence, was called to Rome, painted what, judged by the faded remains, must have been splendid frescoes on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, spent the rest of his life at home in Florence, and late in life fell under the sway of Savonarola.

Appreciating fully the beauty of the mystical religious school of which the summit of achievement had been reached in Fra Angelico, yet impressed with the naturalism and the desire for true technical principles in his contemporaries, he belonged to none of these, but is, as I have said, an expression of the intellectual state of his time—a painter of subtle thoughts—a dreamer impressed with the slight tinge of melancholy natural to dreamers. That he could paint robust specimens of Christianity we can see in the St. Augustine of the Ognissanti or All Saints' Church. That he was, when he chose, a rich colourist, many pictures avouch. His knowledge of landscape and love of things out of doors is evident everywhere in his work, and his painting of drapery has influenced poetical figure painting ever since, and never more than just now in England. But the true Botticelli is to be seen in the best known among the many round pictures, the Coronation, in Tobias and the Angels, the Birth of Venus, the Calumny of Apelles, and the Primavera or Allegory of Spring, and what is at once noticeable is that the poetical spirit of all is the same. The female angels accompanying Tobias are not essentially different from the maidens in the Allegory of Spring, and all with their mobile, passionate faces, suggest lovely creatures

of this earth, fit, perhaps, for heaven, rather than heavenly messengers visiting the earth. Angels and seraphs though they be, they wear most costly and beautiful garments, resplendent with jewels and exquisite embroidery, clearly the product of human hands. Indeed we at once think with ecstasy of the world for having such faces and such garments amongst the possible things to be attained here. Since the advent of Masaccio artists have striven to paint the nude, and in his treatment of nude figures the poetical and intellectual qualities of Botticelli appear. If we turn to the nude figure in the Calumny and to Venus in the Birth of Venus, we must be dull indeed if we are not charmed with the purity and grace with which they are painted. The Coronation in the circular form, frequently referred to as the Madonna of Botticelli, is, however, the finest expression of his poetry and religion combined, if indeed it is not the expressed essence of all the Madonnas painted before it. She wears no jewels, nor earthly-made embroideries. Her garments are ornamented after the early method, and might have been worn by a Madonna of Cimabue. Her face, with its nearly closed eyes, drooping mouth and melancholy, almost suggesting tears, carries the idea of maternity on the one hand and on the other the shrinking sense of possible unfitness to wear the crown and be the mother of the Saviour of the world. The angel children are clearly the result of the bold departure of Fra Lippo Lippi, but how different. Like all the faces of Botticelli, they are not regular types of beauty. They depend for their interest upon the spirituality he is able to express in their faces. They are lovely from the human side, because, unlike the rather vulgar, well-fed children of Fra Lippo Lippi, they are Italian children of the sun and air, with tremulous faces, tender eyes and luxuriant hair; and they are lovely as angels, because if angels are ever

like children, it would be delightful that they should be like these children. But they have no wings, and perhaps he did not mean us to know whether they were angels or merely creatures

" Not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food ;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles "

These lovely children hold over the Virgin's head a crown which looks like a galaxy of stars ; and in the centre of the picture there is a space where in the far distance we see a beautiful bit of the earth—houses and trees, water and hills, and a wash of Italian sunshine over it all. The mysticism of the early Madonnas is there, and the naturalism of the later painters, blended in the melancholy sentiment of Botticelli.

But there is a more important quality in Botticelli than any I have yet mentioned, and one which would hardly be expected from the peculiar nature of his other gifts. He possessed dramatic power of more force than any artist, except Signorelli, until Michael Angelo. Some slight evidence of this quality was seen in two or three rapidly moving figures by Fra Lippo Lippi, to which I referred, but in such a picture as Botticelli's Calumny of Apelles, the action of the whole composition is startling in its furious rapidity, while in such pictures as Tobias and the Angels and the Allegory of Spring, the figures move as if in a rhythmic dance.

I will return in a few minutes to Botticelli's Florentine contemporaries, but before doing so I must introduce two contemporaries who were not Florentines, although influencing that school. Luca Signorelli, born in 1441, at Cortona, and of the Tuscan school,

lived until 1523, when Michael Angelo was 48 years of age. Apprenticed to Piero della Francesca, and clearly influenced by Pollajuolo and Verocchio, he learned all that the scientific school could teach him. He was the first great painter of the nude, apart from the few figures of Masaccio, thus connecting the early attempts of Ucello and Castagna with the consummation of nude drawing reached in Michael Angelo. He had, like Michael Angelo, a tendency towards classical subjects in order to indulge his capacity for correct anatomy and dramatic force, and he was not always free from coarseness. But in such religious subjects as the various phases of the History of Antichrist, in that chapel in the Cathedral at Orvieto which so different a man as Fra Angelico began to decorate, he aimed clearly to emphasize the incidents he treated by depicting the majesty and beauty of the human form. His figures have not much individuality, but he gives to humanity as a whole such an elevated type physically as would have pleased the ancient Greeks. He has the same startling vehemency that we have noticed in Botticelli, but treated in an entirely different and much more correct manner. Indeed, when we look at the intensity of the dramatic action of Michael Angelo, we cannot but feel that he was greatly influenced by Signorelli, whose work we know he copied.

The other contemporary of Botticelli is markedly different. Pietro Perugino, born in 1446, and dying at the same time as Signorelli, was an Umbrian, and through all the changes of his long life the native influence prevailed. He was the crowning development of the beauties and defects of that school. Studying perspective also with Piero della Francesca as his assistant, and subsequently, as I have mentioned, a pupil of Verocchio, he understood anatomy and perspective thoroughly, but they were only a means towards another

end. He is as opposite to Signorelli as Fra Angelico to Castagna. Instead of tremendous dramatic energy, we have in him the most perfect specimen of the contemplative in art. While this lack of action is clearly a serious limitation, no one who has seen will ever forget such a picture as the Adoration of the Infant Jesus in the Pitti Palace gallery. The stillness, the solemn rapture of the central figure, must appeal to every heart, and of its kind it is perfect—Raphael could do no more. His faces are all types, and the range of types is very limited, but no one except Fra Angelico has so expressed the profound depths of the soul. Like his fellow pupil, Leonardo, he was one of the first to paint in oil, and he finished his pictures with the same exquisite care and with rich, luminous colours. His strongest qualities reappear in the early pictures of his pupil Raphael.

Returning to the Florentine school, two painters are always in our mind when we think of Botticelli, his contemporary Ghirlandajo, and his pupil, although only eleven years younger, Filippino Lippi. Beautiful painters, indeed, great masters as they were, I shall not have occasion to say much regarding them. The principles of art were now thoroughly understood in Florence, and these only helped to perfect the processes, not to add new principles or processes. Ghirlandajo, but a few years younger than Botticelli, Signorelli and Perugino, died at 45, long before his contemporaries, and as his development was slow his period of fine work was comparatively short. He was a goldsmith, and Ruskin, who would have us believe that to the end of his life he had only the ideas of a goldsmith, objects to our admiring too much those splendid frescoes in Santa Maria Novella which some of you will remember as among the chief glories of Florence. Yet I fear ordinary people like ourselves will heartily admire these frescoes as long as they remain sufficiently preserved for man-

kind to look at them. He was a man of the highest intelligence, learning from every great painter before and around him, copying even Giotto and Masaccio, and painting with the accuracy and precision of his time the whole range of animate and inanimate things. With his high intelligence and sincerity he did not startle with novelty, but kept within the range of the natural sympathies of man.

Filippino Lippi is to me a much more interesting painter. Studying under Botticelli, he imbibed his spirit, but improved the types of beauty, repressed the over-strained sentiment and dramatic action, giving a splendid dignity to his pictures. He was essentially a great historical painter with unusual capacity for portraiture, individuality, narrative, dramatic action and colour. He finished the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel left on that mysterious night when Masaccio disappeared, and the critics are still disputing as to where Masaccio dropped the brush and Filippino Lippi, long after, took it up.

But the path hitherto so narrow is widening beyond our grasp. It was my purpose to trace the development which led to Raphael and Michael Angelo, and in the Florentine school I have only now to mention Fra Bartolommeo. Born in the same year as Michael Angelo, he died nearly fifty years earlier. Since the appearance of the naturalistic or scientific school I have had occasion to say less and less about purely religious painting. Religious incidents now often merely formed an excuse for the exercise of the artists' skill which would have been exhibited in secular subjects, if the church had not remained the greatest patron of art, just as Turner would introduce into a superb landscape some trifling figures in order to name his picture after a classic story, because the idea that a landscape might be painted for its own sake was not quite

accepted. But for a brief moment Fra Bartolommeo gave the world once more religious pictures conceived in the soul of a devout man. Dowered with genius and technical skill not inferior to any but the three or four greatest painters, he gave us, in the Deposition from the Cross in the Pitti Palace gallery, one of the two or three absolutely perfectly religious pictures in the world.

Without the mysticism of Fra Angelico, the sentiment of Botticelli, or the contemplative stillness of Perugino, he painted, not with reference merely to one or two of the facts centred in religious feeling, but with reference to all the facts of human life.

My story is now finished. When Fra Bartolommeo was born Leonardo had been twenty-three years in the world. Of the work of his delightful school of followers to be seen at Milan I must not speak; Michael Angelo, as I have said, was born in the same year, Titian within the next year or two, and Raphael eight years later.

If I seem to have overloaded my lecture with names, I must plead that I have tried to mention no one who did not directly contribute to the development of painting. I am forced to leave out of my account delightful painters in Bologna, Venice, and other cities over the Apennines, and such interesting contemporaries of Raphael as Il Sodoma and Andrea del Sarto.

My main object is to interest any who are not already interested in a study which has been to me a source of unflinching pleasure for many years. If I have made any who did not already do so, feel that men as widely different as Leonardo, Titian, Raphael and Michael Angelo, have a common origin in Giotto, and also in that second race of reformers referred to by me, for want of a better name, as the scientific painters—and that the four great painters I have mentioned may be better understood by knowing the history of their development—I shall be amply rewarded for my effort.